

Chapter Two

The Romantic Gaze: Selling Customers a Dream of Britain

Old England is everywhere crumbling about our ears, and it is a sorry business trying to find any traces of her nowadays in the Home Counties, but in the Duchy medievalism still exists, the candle lit by the early saints still burns, the age of chivalry is emphatically not dead, and our most remote ancestors still haunt the ancient places.¹

This chapter analyses the GWR's photographic marketing commissioned to target the 'lovers of the picturesque'.² For the GWR, this group, also variously defined as 'artists', 'folklorists', 'antiquarians' and 'pilgrims', constituted a large segment whose importance between 1906 and 1939 is not always recognised. The GWR's marketing was driven by recognition of a peculiarity in the holiday market. The first four decades of the twentieth century witnessed tremendous social, political and economic change which shifted and shaped holidaymaking practices.³ This culminated in a focus on popular entertainment and the 'bathing boom' at the end of the 1920s.⁴ But lovers of the picturesque avoided this. Comprising mainly middle-aged, middle-class, well-educated tourists, as well as a large, essentially American, foreign market, the company believed that such consumers disliked the larger resorts which harboured crowds and amusements instead preferring peace, health, tranquillity and a more 'intellectual' experience of place. In addition, as the quote above

¹ GWR, *The Cornish Riviera*, (1928), p. 7.

² This was a term first which first appeared in the inaugural *Holiday Haunts* and subsequently came to describe the company's understanding of a broad range of consumers with linked interests.

³ Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars*, (London, 1991), p. 8; Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper*, (London, 2010), p. 179.

⁴ John K. Walton, *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century*, (Manchester, 2000), pp. 58-59.

suggests, the GWR saw these customers as searching foremost for romantic, historic, destinations threatened by modernity.

The identification of lovers of the picturesque as an individual market segment was important. The selection of individually tailored imagery for these customers reveals the GWR's emergent notion of passengers being impelled by interests and desires as well as more commonly understood wealth and class considerations. Photography played a key role in this process and its centrality allows the historian to partially reconstruct the GWR's perceptions of this market segment. Rather than using photographs to authentically document place, the GWR carefully selected imagery to sell picturesque travel more as a lifestyle choice based on ideas about who these customers were, what they did for a living, and where they lived for the rest of the year. This chapter analyses why these perceptions developed, what the GWR knew about this group's wants and interests, and ultimately how it used this information to construct signs and symbols which would resonate most closely with this segment.

As the name suggests, part of the GWR's consideration of this market stemmed from an understanding of customers' motivation to seek out, broadly, picturesque destinations. By 1900 the term 'picturesque' had an established history. First coming to prominence during the eighteenth century, it advocated a way of artistically categorising scenery on a more emotional level and as a composed whole.⁵ Before this, landscape had been described as either 'sublime' - representing fear and pain, albeit contained fear and pleasurable pain depicted in dizzying ravines and awe inspiring cliffs⁶ - or 'beautiful', constituting pleasure and society conveyed in domesticated scenes.⁷ 'Picturesque' combined elements of these as a

⁵ Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760-1800*, (Aldershot, 1989), pp. 1-4.

⁶ Cara Aitchison, Nicola MacLeod and Stephen Shaw, *Leisure and Tourism Landscapes: Social and Cultural Geographies*, (London, 2000), p. 74.

⁷ Aitchison, Macleod and Shaw, *Leisure and Tourism Landscapes*, pp. 74-75; Jane Zaring, 'The Romantic Face of Wales', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 67:3 (1977), p. 402.

more ‘natural’ way of viewing landscape. It was a programme for seeing, sketching and otherwise consuming landscape.⁸ The concept received new life in the nineteenth century, finding a voice amongst Pre-Raphaelite painters and others concerned with the impact of industry and urbanisation.⁹ Initially associated with elitism and ‘men of taste’ who travelled abroad in search of an exotic picturesque,¹⁰ by 1900 the popularity of picturesque views meant that, in the popular imagination at least, picturesque had come to mean broadly ‘that which looked good in a picture’.¹¹ This was in no small part down to the popularity of picturesque tourism amongst the middle classes who wished to emulate their social betters by seeing and recording, by sketch, photography or by buying souvenirs, anything that was understood conventionally as picturesque.

However, to say that the GWR rigorously followed an academic understanding of the picturesque would be to reveal only part of how the company approached customers. Such a characterisation would ignore the vast majority of imagery which was motivated by a corporate need not merely to depict place in a visually pleasing way but to give it a story. This chapter argues that an understanding of the picturesque formed part of the GWR’s wider use of what scholars today term the ‘romantic gaze’.¹² The GWR celebrated Britain’s ‘romantic’ attributes as chiefly conjured through history and myth. Partially informed by the artistic and literary movement which championed an appreciation of nature for its own sake, the GWR’s use of ‘romance’ nevertheless owed more to the historical narratives of adventure which combined the real and the improbable.¹³ Romance in this sense was used to denote

⁸ Donna Landry, *The Invention of the Countryside: Hunting, Walking and Ecology in English Literature, 1871-1831*, (New York, 2001), p. 19.

⁹ John Gold and George Revill, *Representing The Environment*, (New York, 2004), p. 132.

¹⁰ Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*, p. 4.

¹¹ John Taylor, *A Dream Of England: Landscape, Photography and the Tourist’s Imagination*, (Manchester, 1994), pp. 17-18.

¹² The ‘Romantic Gaze’ is most closely associated with John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure Travel in Contemporary Societies*, (1st edn., London, 1990); John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, (2nd edn., London, 2002), p. 45.

¹³ Gold and Revill, *Representing The Environment*, pp. 132-33; Judith Weiss, *The Birth of Romance: An Anthology*, (London, 1992), p. ix; Kevin Whetter, *Understanding Genre and Medieval Romance*, (Ashgate, 2008), pp. 1-7.

‘history’. The company released publications entitled, for example, *A Romance of the GWR* (1925) and *The Romance of the Rails* (1935) which celebrated great men and great achievements presented in poetic form. Terms such as ‘picturesque’ and ‘romantic’ were used interchangeably by the GWR, suggesting a malleable corporate understanding rather than a rigorously academic one.¹⁴ This illuminates a nuanced understanding of customers as divided by individual tastes and sensibilities.

The modern concept of the romantic gaze is closely associated with John Urry’s influential work, *The Tourist Gaze*, which addresses the ways that tourists perceive their surroundings and how this attention is directed by resort advertisers.¹⁵ Amongst a taxonomy of appeals, Urry argues that the ‘romantic gaze’ describes visual imagery used to communicate a destination’s solitude, privacy and a semi-spirituality.¹⁶ Other scholars agree that the romantic gaze presents tourists with an image world in complete contrast to their quotidian lives, with the desire for an extraordinary experience being recognised and appealed in imagery engaging consumers on a more emotive, expressive level.¹⁷ As Hummon concludes of modern tourist brochures, history - albeit a usable history - appears repeatedly as an experience to be consumed and enjoyed.¹⁸ This chapter argues that Hummon’s and Urry’s conclusions for modern place-marketers are broadly appropriate for the GWR’s photography: everything pictured was meant to be consumed as a sign of itself.¹⁹ The village as the typical English village, local people indicative of the sensibilities of a particular region, and, in the company’s own words, a rough heap of stones upon a hilltop as ‘the ruins of a castle of great historical interest around which a deal of legend flourishes’.²⁰

¹⁴ This ‘malleability’ reflected wider social understandings: Stephen Hebron, *The Romantics and the British Landscape*, (London, 2006), pp. ii-vii.

¹⁵ Walton, *The British Seaside*, p. 16.

¹⁶ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 2nd edn., p. 45.

¹⁷ Kevin Meethan, *Tourism in Global Society: Place, Culture, Consumption*, (Basingstoke, 2001), p. 82.

¹⁸ David Hummon, ‘Tourist Worlds: Tourist Advertising, Ritual, and American Culture’, *The Sociological Quarterly*, 29:2 (1988), pp. 193-94.

¹⁹ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 2nd edn., p. 128.

²⁰ GWRM, December 1924, p. 468.

The inclusion of these signs marks out the lover of the picturesque as a significant market segment, but also the GWR's deeper engagement with what motivated them and how it could use apparently 'realistic' photography to shape this.

Bennett has already partially examined the GWR's corporate 'romantic gaze', albeit in the textual construction of Englishness.²¹ Broadly this chapter agrees with his findings; the GWR's presentation of areas such as Wales, for example, was decisively that of romantic spectacle rather than a truer recognition of areas of depressed industry.²² Similarly, the GWR's construction of Anglo-Saxon English identification, revealed in its political, historical and aesthetic characterisations as the cultural landscape of Englishness and authority, was reinforced by reference to the company's 'Celtic' representation.²³ The historical dimension was a definitive feature of the GWR's literary record.²⁴ But this chapter analyses the complementary use of photography to determine what, in addition to Bennett analysis, the photographs can reveal about marketing intentions. They may have been seen to do more, or reach customers in different ways. For example, contrasting GWR's textual publicity with that of the Southern Railway (SR), Bennett suggests that the GWR's efforts were thematically, structurally and stylistically exclusive and inaccessible to the popular market.²⁵ Photographic marketing may have been seen to bridge this divide, allowing customers to more readily draw parallels between the GWR's corporate messages and contemporary concerns. This idea will be explored throughout this chapter, becoming particularly prominent in the third section which examines the GWR's depiction of fading of rural communities in the 1920s.

²¹ Alan Bennett, 'The Great Western Railway and The Celebration of Englishness', (Unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of York, 2000).

²² Bennett, 'The Great Western Railway and The Celebration of Englishness', pp. 78-79.

²³ Bennett, 'The Great Western Railway and The Celebration of Englishness', p. 76.

²⁴ Bennett, 'The Great Western Railway and The Celebration of Englishness', p. 110.

²⁵ Bennett, 'The Great Western Railway and The Celebration of Englishness', p. 179.

Above all this chapter argues that company photography was not simply decorative or ornamental. It agrees with Aitchison's assertion that rather than a 'natural' relationship, the affinity that humans have for landscape is predominantly a product of the imagination, shaped by a variety of social and cultural constructs.²⁶ The GWR's romantic gaze was a commercially motivated attempt to influence a particular set of customers and to get them to associate the company with particular interests. Taking a chronological sweep across the first four decades of the twentieth century, this analysis considers how the romantic gaze was established and manipulated, drawing broader conclusions on how market segmentation functioned and was understood by the company throughout this period. First, this chapter analyses which customers the GWR saw as 'lovers of the picturesque' and how this identification shaped marketing thought.

Section 1: Who were the 'Lovers of the Picturesque'?

It is important to outline why the GWR understood these customers as grouped together, what they desired, and how these differed to tastes of other markets. It confirms that photographic procurement and selection was shaped by deeper consideration of potential customers. As already seen, in some ways the GWR's sensitivity to the wants of 'lovers of the picturesque' around 1900 relied on tourist cultures which had existed for some 150 years. The search for the picturesque had long been a chief motivation to holiday,²⁷ and although initially an upper-class trend it developed further as a way of separating middle-class pleasure

²⁶ Aitchison, Macleod and Shaw, *Leisure and Tourism Landscapes*, p. 77.

²⁷ Jeffrey Hill, *Sport Leisure and Culture in Twentieth-Century Britain*, (New York, 2002), p. 87; James Vernon, 'Border Crossings: Cornwall and the English (imagi)nation', in Geoffrey Cubitt (ed.), *Imagining Nations*, (Manchester, 1998), p. 162; Gold and Revill, *Representing The Environment*, pp. 133-34; Taylor, *A Dream Of England*, p. 5; Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*, p. 5.

from the rise in working-class leisure around the 1870s and 1880s.²⁸ Such a received history, based to a large extent on class-appropriate considerations of leisure, belies a greater level of consideration among twentieth century companies, such as the GWR, of who was most interested in the picturesque and what motivated their consumption. Whilst traditional consumption rituals undoubtedly informed at least part of the GWR's understanding of its consumers, there is evidence to suggest that the company perceived lovers of the picturesque as a set of multivalent characters whose interests could be moulded to suit commercial considerations.

References to customers linked by taste as 'lovers of the picturesque' appeared countless times throughout the GWR's publicity. The inaugural 1906 volume of *Holiday Haunts* claimed to have their interests at its heart,²⁹ and each subsequent volume targeted the tastes and sensibilities of this market in some form. *Holiday Haunts* presented the search for the picturesque as fulfilling a range of social desires; the promotion of good health, a fashionable form of conspicuous consumption, and an educated experience of place. The GWR believed picturesque tourists to possess refinement and taste, thus text was not simply left to publicity department staff with an interest in the subject. A. M. Broadley, a respected travel writer and antiquarian,³⁰ was appointed to edit *Holiday Haunts*, *The Cornish Riviera*, and several other publications. In the 1920s S.P.B Mais, a famous champion of rurality,³¹ provided material for *Holiday Haunts*, books on Devon and Cornwall, and numerous press announcements.³² Mais had a more popular reach, and believed that many who followed his work wanted to escape their daily grind. He wrote as a 'companionable guide' for the

²⁸ Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*, p. 4; Taylor, *A Dream Of England*, pp. 90-120; Aitchison, Macleod and Shaw, *Leisure and Tourism Landscapes*, pp. 74-75; Gold and Revill, *Representing The Environment*, pp. 133-34.

²⁹ GWR, *Holiday Haunts*, (1906), p. 1.

³⁰ Wilson, *Go Great Western*, p. 84.

³¹ Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, p. 208; Roger Wilson, *Go Great Western: A History Of GWR Publicity*, (Newton Abbott, 1987), p. 30, 98 and 115.

³² Wilson, *Go Great Western*, p. 30.

ordinary man as well as the more dedicated lover of the picturesque,³³ and in this sense his appointment reflected a change in admitting ‘new’ members of the middle class in the 1920s. Dorothea ‘Maxwell’ Fraser (as we have seen, a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society) succeeded Mais in 1929. She too was an esteemed author and keen advocate of the romantic and intellectual spirit of travel for the masses.³⁴ For those wishing to pursue further an interest in the history of place there was a range of supplementary material written by experts. *Devon: The Shire of the Sea Kings; South Wales: The Country Of Castles; and The Cathedral Line of England* all responded to an appetite for historical and romantic place literature devoid of working class perspectives.

Class consideration thus informed production. Broadley wrote that whilst 100 years previously picturesque tourism had been the preserve of an elite few in a foreign clime, contemporary Britain provided approximate experiences for an increasing, yet discerning, number.³⁵ Before 1914, within a broad band of middle-class demand, the company perceived artists, writers, photographers, academics, and antiquarians topping its target market. In the following decades this definition changed to admit the ‘new’ middle-class, swelled by modern industries and rising standards of living, but the material continued to address people ‘in the know’; those with refined sensibilities. Thus in the 1920s, those who traditionally searched for the picturesque, ‘The professional man – the lawyer, doctor, journalist, teacher’,³⁶ were joined by city clerks and the offspring, for example, of the motor trade. As we shall see below, when the GWR thought of the middle classes it commonly concluded that it was speaking to those living in urban areas. But all were seen to retain an interest in ‘art, literature, learning, music, drama, architecture’, appreciating ‘literary merit, historic research

³³ Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, p. 208.

³⁴ Wilson, *Go Great Western*, p. 101; Bennett, ‘The Great Western Railway and The Celebration of Englishness’, p. 6.

³⁵ GWR, *Holiday Haunts*, (1906), p. 5.

³⁶ GWR, *Cardigan Bay resorts: Aberystwyth to Pwllheli*, (c.1920s).

and antiquarian knowledge'.³⁷ Indeed, the description recognised that to justify their place amongst the traditional middle-class, newcomers sought this kind of holiday as a mark of distinction.³⁸ The working classes, who, more generally, were too familiar with low levels of consumption to be seen to desire a holiday in a simpler, pastoral setting,³⁹ were largely ignored. But by the 1930s, the admittance of 'jaded city workers' revealed that picturesque tourism was no longer seen in elite terms and that, for the GWR at least, class was less of a barrier to enjoyment of Britain's cultural and heritage sites.⁴⁰ The shift in who constituted this market informed how photographic marketing was conceived in the late 1920s and early 1930s, with destinations presented more in terms of their romantic allusions than their inherent artistic qualities, and afterwards more as entertainment centres.

Although the company progressively broadened the class appeal of this kind of holiday, the GWR always imagined the lover of the picturesque as chiefly an urban dweller, particularly 'the wearied dweller in one of the larger cities'.⁴¹ The 1901 census revealed England, and to a lesser extent Wales, as the world's first truly urban nation with seventy-seven per-cent of the population living in urban areas.⁴² Recognising this condition, the GWR targeted an appetite to experience and feel closer to nature. Martin Wiener argues that during the first decades of the twentieth century the middle classes who had prospered from industry became embarrassed by their association with the built environment. To distance themselves from it, both culturally and spatially, they went in search of nature to 'cleanse' body and mind as well as hoping to heighten their social standing by proving their commitment to an educated experience of place.⁴³ Although Wiener's thesis on the decline

³⁷ GWR, *Holiday Haunts*, (1927), p. 25 and 197.

³⁸ Hill, *Sport Leisure and Culture in Twentieth-Century Britain*, pp. 77-79.

³⁹ Jan Marsh, *Back to the Land: The Pastoral Impulse in England, 1880-1914*, (London, 2012), p. 6.

⁴⁰ GWR, *Holiday Haunts*, (1935), p. 33.

⁴¹ 'Do Railways Believe In Advertising?', GWRM, April 1913, pp. 102-03.

⁴² Alun Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England: A Social History 1850-1925*, (London, 1991), p. 2.

⁴³ Martin Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit*, (2nd edition, Cambridge, 2004), pp. 5-6.

of industrial spirit has been challenged,⁴⁴ the desire for a simpler rural-past can be seen diversely in contemporary middle-class culture, in high art and popular media,⁴⁵ but also in the mock-historic style houses and street names such as ‘Meadowside’, ‘Woodview’ and ‘Fieldsend’.⁴⁶ By the 1880s the lure of suburbia was already established amongst people with money and ‘taste’,⁴⁷ and over the next twenty years more people saw the countryside as an imaginative form of urban escape.⁴⁸ By tying its holiday marketing more closely to these aspirations, the GWR capitalised on the idea that, although working in the city might have been an economic necessity, living there was regarded as hectic, stressful and unpleasant.⁴⁹ The company recognised that reading about or planning a holiday was a further means of escaping, imaginatively at first, from the pressures of urban life. It offered flight to a simpler world, or rather, a world which had been ‘deliberately simplified’ as a contrast to the social complexities of the city.⁵⁰ This process, distilling the key elements of a desired experience of rural-historic Britain, best sums up the GWR’s visual narratives about picturesque tourism.

The company overlooked the contradictory nature of desiring industry and progress on one the hand but despising it on the other. Instead it sought to normalise the practice as essential to modern life. The GWR argued, for example, that a restful holiday would improve one’s efficiency upon a return to work. This ploy featured right from the earliest guidebooks, as in 1908’s *Holiday Haunts*;

⁴⁴ Roderick Floud, ‘Review: English Culture and the Decline of The Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980: by Martin J. Wiener’, *Journal of Economic Literature*, 20:2 (1982), pp. 592-593; Peter Marsh, Reviewed work(s): Lords and Landlords: The Aristocracy and the Towns, 1774-1967 by David Cannadine, English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980 by Martin J. Wiener’, *The Journal of Modern History*, 55:1 (1983), pp. 121-123.

⁴⁵ Fred Inglis, ‘Landscape as Popular Culture’, in Simon Pugh (ed.) *Reading Landscape: Country-City-Capital*, (Manchester, 1990), pp. 197-213.

⁴⁶ Gold and Revill, *Representing The Environment*, p. 201; Alan Jackson, *Semi-detached London; Suburban Development, Life and Transport, 1900-39*, (London, 1991), p. 170; Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England*, p. 97.

⁴⁷ Hill, *Sport Leisure and Culture in Twentieth-Century Britain*, p. 87.

⁴⁸ Taylor, *A Dream Of England*, p. 24.

⁴⁹ Gold and Revill, *Representing The Environment*, p. 201.

⁵⁰ Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*, p. 5.

Day by day it is more and more apparent that some period of rest and relaxation...is rapidly becoming one of the essentials of our exciting twentieth century existence. What was once a question of caprice and luxury is now a necessity, if the danger of a breakdown is to be avoided.⁵¹

The theme continued into the 1920s;

The professional man...is probably amongst the hardest-worked of our times...it becomes an absolute necessity in these days for each and everyone at times to lay aside everything and recreate themselves.⁵²

When city-dwellers thought of the countryside it was as a place of quietude and escape from the social demands and noise of the city.⁵³ As we shall see, the GWR's photographic marketing to this segment omitted visual references to modernity, instead presenting a range of destinations as the opposite of contemporary urban life. Representation of modern agricultural machinery, advertising, telegraph poles and cars was all carefully avoided to suggest that pre-modern encounters could still be made in early-twentieth century Britain. Although products of the twentieth century, the photographs were therefore intended to be understood as windows onto distant and more tranquil centuries.

Maintaining this ideal occasionally proved difficult. Although consumers wanted a rough, bucolic experience, they still desired modern comforts. Whilst much GWR marketing shunned allusions to modernity, a fusion of traditional and modern was offered, for example, in carriages which conveyed tourists. The company's carriages were described as 'the best

⁵¹ GWR, *Holiday Haunts* (1908).

⁵² GWR, *Cardigan Bay Resorts: Aberystwyth to Pwllheli*, (c.1920s).

⁵³ Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, p. 179.

modern science and expert workmanship can produce'.⁵⁴ Similarly, modernity and traditionalism conditioned the presentation of the GWR's famous Tregenna Castle hotel. Although described as 'un-modernised except for the recent addition of wings', the hotel boasted 'a well-sprung dancing floor, telephones, central heating, electric lighting and white tiled bathrooms'.⁵⁵ Perceptions about who was consuming picturesque travel, who desired it, and where they were from, informed the GWR's conclusion that although outwardly customers desired the simple, natural life, they were uncomfortable with totally relinquishing twentieth-century comforts.

In this case the GWR employed its own take on 'conservative modernity'.⁵⁶ This concept captures the simultaneous looking backwards and forwards to accommodate the past in the new forms of the present.⁵⁷ Rieger has argued that whilst observers fervently admired many innovations they simultaneously responded to these with anxiety, finding them intellectually and emotionally confusing.⁵⁸ They therefore looked to the past to make sense of the present. Whilst conservative modernity helps describe the anti-modern culture in certain quarters of Britain after the First World War examined below, it is also appropriate to look for it in how certain businesses made innovations more palatable by grounding them in well-understood traditions. This contrasting perspective has been identified, for example, by Saler in his work on London's underground railway. Termed 'Medieval Modernism' by Saler, he argues that the Underground's marketers appropriated a usable past which reinvigorated

⁵⁴ GWR, *Holiday Haunts*, (1909).

⁵⁵ GWR, *The Great Western Railway: Hotels and Catering*, (1925).

⁵⁶ Light, *Forever England*, p. 10.

⁵⁷ For Germany, see the related concept 'reactionary modernity'. Reactionary modernists claimed that Germany could be both technologically advanced and true to its soul – as Joseph Goebbels insisted that Germany could move forward with *stählernde Romantik*, 'steellike romanticism': Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, (Cambridge, 1984), p. 3.

⁵⁸ Bernhard Rieger, *Technology and The Culture Of Modernity In Britain and Germany, 1890-1945*, (Cambridge, 2004), p. 2.

earlier traditions as a way to negotiate the present.⁵⁹ Other scholars have analysed how this potentially contradictory idea applied to the railway technology,⁶⁰ but here it captures the GWR's appeal to particular urban, middle-class holidaymakers. Unlike other railways the GWR did not fully commit to an image of cutting-edge progression but at the same time it realised that passengers would be put off by a company whose worldview and operation was centuries behind the times. Hence a negotiation, captured in the ideas behind conservative modernity, points to greater consideration of what passengers wanted.

As well as the domestic market, the GWR considered other groups who might be interested in an essentially picturesque vision of Britain. To the GWR, a company which served some of Britain's major seaports, the American market held particular potential. Prior to the 1900s this was a market largely untapped by the company. Word of mouth and the presence of some exported publications constituted the limit of GWR foreign marketing. This changed in the twentieth century as the company began to produce dedicated overseas publications. *Historic Sites and Scenes of England* (1905) and *Places of Pilgrimage for American Travellers* (1905) were two such volumes which married lyrical prose to 'old-fashioned' imagery. Growing this market quickened in 1907 when publicity offices were established in New York and Toronto.⁶¹ Heading these offices, Mr. Kateley and Mr. Burch fielded enquiries, arranged tickets and distributed literature. These efforts were augmented in the 1920s under Felix Pole's leadership. In his autobiography, Pole wrote of his longstanding conviction that Britain could and should attract more foreign visitors.⁶² Responding to this stipulation the company redoubled its efforts in depicting cultural and heritage sites in

⁵⁹ Michael Saler, 'The "Medieval Modern" Underground: Terminus of the Avant-Garde', *Modernism/Modernity*, 2:1 (1995), p. 16; see also Michael Saler, *The Avant-Garde in Interwar England*, (Oxford, 1999).

⁶⁰ Colin Divall and Hiroki Shin, 'Cultures of Speed and Conservative Modernity: Representations of Speed in Britain's Railway Marketing', Benjamin Fraser and Steven Spalding (eds.), *Trains, Culture, and Mobility: Riding the Rails: Volume 2*, (Lanham, 2012), p. 6; D.C.H Watts, 'Evaluating British Railway Poster Advertising: The London and North Eastern Railway Between The Wars', *Journal of Transport History*, 3rd ser. 25:2 (2004), p. 47.

⁶¹ GWRM, September 1907, p. 246.

⁶² Felix Pole, *Felix J.C. Pole: His Book*, (London, 1969), p. 204.

Holiday Haunts and re-released *Historic Sites and Scenes of England* in 1924. That the company was alive to the benefits of such tourism was emphasised in 1935 in the company magazine;

One of the most notable travel features of the past summer has been the increase in the number of foreign visitors to Great Britain...Of special interest to the GWR is the fact that American visitors landing at Plymouth in July totalled 3409 an increase of 821 over last year. The Board of Trade estimate that the average expenditure of business and holiday visitors is £30 per head therefore up to the end of July the value of Britain's foreign visitors amounted to £5,645,370.⁶³

The company recognised the economic value of these customers and it was successful in attracting them: by 1930 the New York office dealt with some 8000 public enquiries per month in the high season.⁶⁴ The GWR's foresight in encouraging foreign travel was revealed in the fact that several GWR men were instrumental in promoting the late-1920s 'Come to Britain' movement and later the British Tourist Association.⁶⁵

It was common practice in the larger publications to target the foreign market with succinct side-panels in addition to each photographic section. These made evident the perceived similarities between foreign tourists and the domestic lover of the picturesque, even if they hailed from markedly different backgrounds. Accompanied by images which depicted foreign tourists disembarking from steamships (Figures 2.1 and 2.2), the text claimed;

⁶³ GWRM, October 1935, p. 560.

⁶⁴ GWRM June 1930, p. 249.

⁶⁵ See Pole's autobiography for an account of his assistance in developing the British Tourist Association, Pole, *His Book*, p. 204.

The most famous historic sites and scenes of England are all readily accessible by the GWR...the railway caters lavishly for the sight-seeing traveller and holiday-maker. There are no more charming and diversified places of interest than those served by this line.⁶⁶

The result was something the GWR did well; using images and text to create a sense of arrival and anticipation. Figures 2.1 and 2.2, although at odds to the bulk of the bucolic imagery aimed at this market, engaged the foreign customer by requesting they imagine themselves amongst those shown disembarking. The use of ships continued the GWR's perception of foreign tourists who were 'Pilgrims' wishing to reconnect with lost ancestors.⁶⁷ These ancestors could be felt at Stratford, amongst Royal Palaces, and countless quaint and charming British scenes. It is possible that by referencing the steamships the GWR wanted to show that modern, comfortable amenities featured at each stage of the customer's search for the picturesque; they could experience the past in the comfort of the present. In the company's own words, it was the *line de luxe* for overseas travellers, as well as offering unparalleled access to Britain's ancient attractions.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ GWR, *Holiday Haunts*, (1910).

⁶⁷ The Introduction to 1905's *Historic Sites and Scenes of England* described, 'Year after years the numbers of Americans of all classes who visit our shores with the object of exploring, with feelings of deep interest and veneration, the historic sites of that eventful past of which they are today the co-heirs and living representatives, is steadily increasing', p. 5.

⁶⁸ GWR, *Holiday Haunts*, (1909).



Figure 2.1: 'Passengers disembarking from ocean liner at Fishguard harbour', 1909



Figure 2.2: 'Arrival of an Ocean Liner at Fishguard Harbour', 1909

Essentially this use of picturesque and romantic pasts was the same as that directed at the domestic market; the past was fundamentally a comfortable and cosy place which could still be reached by modern technology such as trains. The company's overarching definition of this market was, therefore, a set of customers joined by their desire for anti-modernity and a determination to reconnect with Britain's historic past. The GWR did not create the

market for picturesque travel. To some extent it relied on established preferences amongst middle-class travellers and the ways of seeing and representing the environment prevalent for generations. However, the company made a number of observations about potential customers; that they came from urban areas and required a change of scenery; that they were interested in an historic Britain ‘disappearing’ under the challenge of modernity; and that this interest was shared internationally. These conclusions led the GWR to pinpoint ideas about ‘the past’ which were ripe for commercial manipulation. All of this evidence adds further weight to the counter-claim that the company’s advertising was not lacklustre and outdated but directed by a deeper understanding of customers’ interests.

This chapter now examines how these interpretations of customer preference informed photographic marketing, and how the GWR visually communicated its ‘vast storehouse of myth and legend’⁶⁹ through symbolic pictorial content. The process behind this becomes clearer; the GWR used its ideas about who was consuming and their motivations, and selected imagery to match this.

Section 2: The Romantic Gaze 1906-1914

Although united under the nomenclature ‘lovers of the picturesque’, the GWR recognised that visual appeals should be as variegated as the customers themselves. But rather than an unsophisticated assortment of ideas, this eclecticism reflected contemporary attitudes to fine art as well as the values and ideas of connected movements such as Arts and Crafts and ‘Back-to-the Land’ which championed their own brand of bucolic, idyllic imagery.⁷⁰ Despite the inherent differences between all these, they shared a cultural middle

⁶⁹ GWR, *Holiday Haunts*, (1935).

⁷⁰ Marsh, *Back to the Land*, p. 7.

ground where ideas and impulses from each were fused and held together.⁷¹ Indeed, the popularity of the latter movements extended from the fact that their ideas were somewhat open to interpretation. Supporters could develop their own perceptions in line with their own tastes.⁷² It was this middle ground, that which referenced, broadly, anti-modernity and the wider celebration of nature, that the GWR employed. Assisted by Bennett's assessment of the company's literary record, this section confirms that the GWR engaged a multivalent, flexible romantic gaze which allowed for wide commercial appeal.

Firstly, we can define similarities between the GWR's corporate photography and the popular aesthetics of fine art. Fine art conventions were used by advertisers of a range of goods during the Edwardian period, a technique to lend cachet to consumption.⁷³ For the GWR, linking travel to art appreciation meant making some of its own photographs conform roughly to visions common of the artistic picturesque, presumably to make the 'realistic' photograph appear more as the dream-world of art. At one level a comparable aesthetic was not difficult. Certain 'beauty spots' had been well marked out for picturesque veneration, specifically abbeys, brooks, churches, cottages, crags, crosses, farms, gables, ivy, lanes, locks, oaks, ponds, rustic bridges, waterfalls, stone walls and woods.⁷⁴ All were signs connoting widely held ideas about peace, beauty, nature and the past. The GWR photographers ensured to include them, but there was an additional level of nuance. The GWR, like other tourism marketers,⁷⁵ sought to influence tourist patterns by emulating actual scenes which were part of common consciousness.

⁷¹ S.K. Tillyard, *The Impact of Modernism 1900-1920: Early Modernism and the Arts and Crafts Movement in Edwardian England*, (London, 1988), p. xv.

⁷² Marsh, *Back to the Land*, p. 7.

⁷³ Lori-Anne Loeb, *Consuming Angels: Advertising and Victorian Women*, (Oxford, 1994), pp. 26-36.

⁷⁴ John Taylor, 'The Alphabetic Universe: Photography and the Picturesque Landscape', in Simon Pugh (ed.) *Reading Landscape: Country-City-Capital*, (Manchester, 1990), p. 181.

⁷⁵ Peter Howard, 'Artists as Drivers of the Tour Bus: Landscape Painting as a Spur to Tourism', in David Crouch and Nina Lübbren (eds.), *Visual Culture and Tourism*, (Oxford, 2003), pp. 109-24.

As seen in the previous chapter, GWR photographers sought to capture places for their cultural value. The rocks at Burrington Combe, for example, were photographed because the hymn 'Rock of Ages' was composed there.⁷⁶ It is plausible that this awareness extended outwards to include fine art. Take for example the GWR's image of 'Dogelly' (Figure 2.3) in contrast to John Webber's 'View of a Cascade at Wookey Hole' (Figure 2.4). Although one cannot say for certain the degree of direct influence, the parallels are immediately obvious. For the picturesque painters archetypal 'wildness' could be found in torrential waterfalls, traditionally associated with the sublime and indicative of the dramatic force of nature against human inadequacy.⁷⁷ Both 'Dogelly' and 'Cascade' exhibit this in their turbulent, treacherous 'basins'.⁷⁸ The presence of beaten vegetation and the arrangement and size of rocks in each image presents a further contrast. The similarities convey an appreciation, on behalf of GWR publicists and photographers, of what the customer was used to seeing in books and treatises on the picturesque, and how it could be used to direct how holiday destinations were perceived.

⁷⁶ The National Archives (TNA), ZPER 38/6, Great Western Railway (London): Lecture and Debating Society Proceedings 1908-1909, meeting of 5th November 1908 'Experiences of Railway Photography' by Harold Cooper, pp. 1-10.

⁷⁷ Gold and Revill, *Representing The Environment*, pp. 132-33.

⁷⁸ The Leger Galleries, *British Landscape Painting*, (London, 1992), pp. 34-35.



Figure 2.3: ‘Dolgelly – Torrent Walk’, 1914



Figure 2.4: John Webber (1750-1793): A view of a Cascade at Wookey Hole, Somerset⁷⁹

The GWR’s ‘Doone Valley’ (Figure 2.5) presented another understanding of the picturesque, the composed vista. A similarity to painterly conventions was arguably sought here too when one inspects Girtin’s ‘Lydford Castle’ (Figure 2.6). Although the photograph could not capture the thundrous skies as artistically, the impression of a natural, sparsely

⁷⁹ Leger Galleries, *British Landscape Painting*, pp. 34-35.

populated, bucolic environment probably informed the framing of the GWR's composition. In both images, the low, undulating, natural landscape was seen to enclose and support the human elements – the cottage in Figure 2.5 and the church in 2.6 – to suggest man's oneness with nature. This kind of scene was repeated countless times within the pages of *Holiday Haunts* and *The Cornish Riviera* and, again, although the degree of direct influence is impossible to discern, the company's images were arguably informed both by the visual rhetoric which identified the picturesque as well as the pictorial conventions which had become a part of the collective cultural consciousness.



Figure 2.5: 'The Doone Valley', 1914



Figure 2.6: Thomas Girtin (1775-1802): Lydford Castle, Devon⁸⁰

To cite a further example, fishermen and fishing villages represented one of the most popular fine art subjects at the turn of the century.⁸¹ As we will see presently, the GWR sought representational similarities here too. Although it would be imprudent to assume that in every case a direct comparison drove photographic appearance, the overall point stands: the company's photographs generally shared a similarity to images which has passed into the public consciousness. Each photograph was a part of a wider twentieth century awareness and sign system which venerated and drew upon exemplary rural scenes such as John Constable's 'The Haywain' (1821). Emulation was an attempt to tap into the aura surrounding a romanticised past which the GWR argued was still available at many present-day locations. The images above are a small sample, but they nevertheless confirm that the GWR was not merely interested in representing place as a realistic vision of what customers could expect in terms of its physicality. Rather, company publicists presented destinations as

⁸⁰ Leger Galleries, *British Landscape Painting*, pp. 80-82.

⁸¹ Nina Lübbren, 'Toilers of the Sea: Fisherfolk and the Geographies of Tourism in England 1880-1900', in David Corbett, Ysanne Holt, Fiona Russell (eds.), *The Geographies of Englishness: Landscape and the National Past 1880-1940*, (Hampshire, 2002), pp. 29-31.

possessing additional vaunted qualities connected to paintings, and responded to the desire to see place along structured lines.

At a time when industrialisation spread out across the land, the artist's and photographer's eye helped shape the collective vision of what should be desired and what should be despised in a rural setting. As outlined above, the GWR perceived customers in this segment as hailing predominantly from urban areas. In turn it saw them desiring the exact opposite, a village-world untouched by modernity. There were specifications to this; places just outside London, in the Cotswolds and in Worcestershire, conformed to the wider projection of southern England as ordered, traditional and romantic.⁸² The GWR possessed a number of visual techniques to present these villages as hideaways from urban sprawl. The houses at places such as Denham (Figure 2.7) appeared with ivy-clad frontages and rough brickwork, the antithesis of the modern urban 'semi'. They came with a supporting cast of labourers with horse-carts. These 'locals' were the only people admitted into the picturesque for they were imagined to be preserving traditional ways of life. Images of simple pre-industrial villagers, seemingly untouched by the developments of technology, industry and commerce, served as reassurance that life in the villages went on as before industrialisation.⁸³ Similarly, the Cotswolds was presented by the GWR as the definitive English organic community, quintessentially pastoral and rooted in aesthetic harmony and historic continuity.⁸⁴ Places such as Bourton-On-Water (Figure 2.8) connoted man in harmony with nature, a message reinforced by the dominance of the foliage, in terms of its size and place in the photograph, dwarfing the man-made bridge and dwellings. The Cotswolds had been opened to holidaymakers in the early 1900s by the GWR's newly constructed Cheltenham-Honeybourne line. Although built predominantly to serve the fruit growing industry in the

⁸² David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, (London, 1998), p. 17.

⁸³ Lübbren, 'Toilers of the Sea', pp. 29-31.

⁸⁴ Bennett, 'The Great Western Railway and The Celebration of Englishness', p. 61.

Vale of Evesham, the then General Manager, James Inglis, publicised the region to tourists as ‘a railway through the garden of England’.⁸⁵

This country undoubtedly is [beautiful]; its bold hills with clear contours, its beautiful slopes, dells and rivulets, hamlets and villages perched at many different altitudes, present a variety of attraction, certainly not surpassed by any other countryside in the United Kingdom.⁸⁶

Inglis captured the appeal perfectly, and went on to note the popularity of small, quintessentially picturesque villages amongst American tourists, claiming that foreigners could better convey the attraction than Britishers because it was so alien to American culture. The photographs selected to publicise the Cotswolds and its surrounding environs, Gloucestershire and Worcestershire, typified this otherworldly focus. Image content played an important role therefore, but the omissions are also significant. A broad pictorial convention which separated images intended for the lover of picturesque from other markets was the exclusion of all people other than those identifiable as locals. This technique, Lenham argues for Edwardian photographers more generally, appealed to the conceit of simultaneously being a tourist yet despising the presence of others.⁸⁷ Believing that the peopled image appealed to different customers, those who sought popularity and modernity, photographers visited destinations at the break of dawn to procure imagery devoid of popular associations. The absence of people signified peace and solitude, and by extension connoted an exclusive experience which was well-received amongst a certain section of middle class demand. For this reason, none of the GWR’s images intended for the lover of the picturesque

⁸⁵ GWRM, October 1904, pp. 167-70.

⁸⁶ GWRM, October 1904, p. 168.

⁸⁷ Robin Lenham, ‘British Photographers and Tourism in the Nineteenth Century’, in David Crouch and Nina Lübbren (eds.), *Visual Culture and Tourism*, (Oxford, 2003), p. 94.

displayed people consuming the destination; a strategy for clearly and immediately segmenting desires which becomes clearer when one considers the images intended for, say, the family market, discussed in the next chapter. One will notice also that this extended to other prominent signs of modernity; wires, road markings and motorised vehicles.



Figure 2.7: 'Denham Village', 1906



Figure 2.8: 'Bourton-On-Water', 1915

So far we have identified a number of examples through which the GWR championed a more artistically derived, 'painterly' picturesque. But other images signify the GWR's more nuanced engagement with 'myth-making'. The GWR's early use of a more poeticised 'romantic gaze' in this case is evident in photographs which invested places with myth and legend, and were intended to be read as such. Rather than photographic trustworthiness, the company used imagery to create visual narratives of a fantasy world. The overarching desire was to sell travel as a ticket to history where ancient practices and characters, apparently untouched by modernity, could be uncovered. The buildings and ruins pictured might have possessed no real significance, but captured and re-contextualised into long visual and textual narratives they became part of a sign system which signified the romantic past. This centred on events of cultural significance, exemplified in the presentation of Arthurian legend and Elizabethan triumph, as well as more mysterious practices and local customs. In addition to the domestic lover of the picturesque, this was a durable ploy to the American market; the GWR spread the idea that these 'pilgrims' could not only trace ancestral connections, they could find their ancestors' homes, lands and customs well preserved.

How this process was articulated is evident both in the instructions given to photographers and the ways the company encouraged consumers to interpret the resultant imagery. As seen in Chapter One, GWR photographers were encouraged to photograph places because of what happened centuries ago, not how they looked to contemporaries.⁸⁸ This historical dimension was deemed essential to ascribing destinations additional value. In this case, however, the photographs also relied on straightforward yet interesting captions which directed the viewer in decoding the photographic message. By educating the viewer on the photographs' additional meaning, it was hoped viewers would begin to weave their own narratives with photography as the basis. Revealed a number of years later, the goal was

⁸⁸ TNA, ZPER 38/6, meeting of 5th November 1908, pp. 1-10.

to make ‘what hitherto appeared to be a rough heap of stones upon a hilltop’ as ‘the ruins of a castle of great historical interest around which a deal of legend flourishes’.⁸⁹

A number of Edwardian examples epitomise this objective. Images such as Droitwich’s ‘famous old ducking stool’ (Figure 2.9), Shilston Cromlech (Figure 2.10), and St Veryan (Figure 2.11), told potential passengers nothing of the aesthetic character of these places, their climate, whether they were urban or rural, or of available amenities or activities. They instead confirmed that consumers could access a world far different from their everyday experience, where the past lived on apparently unchanged. As in the case of Burrington Combe, there was apparently little artistic method behind the photograph of Droitwich’s ducking stool. It was photography at its most basic, recording a piece of machinery for posterity. Yet as part of the generation of a romantic vision, the marketing message becomes clear. Re-contextualised in *Holiday Haunts*, and with the aid of its caption, the image connoted a historic ritual, a practice that was ‘old’ and ‘famous’, making for an intriguing summation of ‘Droitwich’. Located in the midlands and famous for its salt water health spas more so than its ducking stool,⁹⁰ the inclusion of this image in 1910 suggests the GWR’s part desire to look outwards beyond conventional markets and reshape the popular understandings and associations with destinations.

⁸⁹ GWRM, December 1924, p. 468.

⁹⁰ David Cantor, ‘The Contradictions of Specialisation: Rheumatism and the Decline of the spa in Interwar Britain’, in Roy Porter (ed.), *The Medical History of Waters and Spas*, (London, 1990), p. 142.

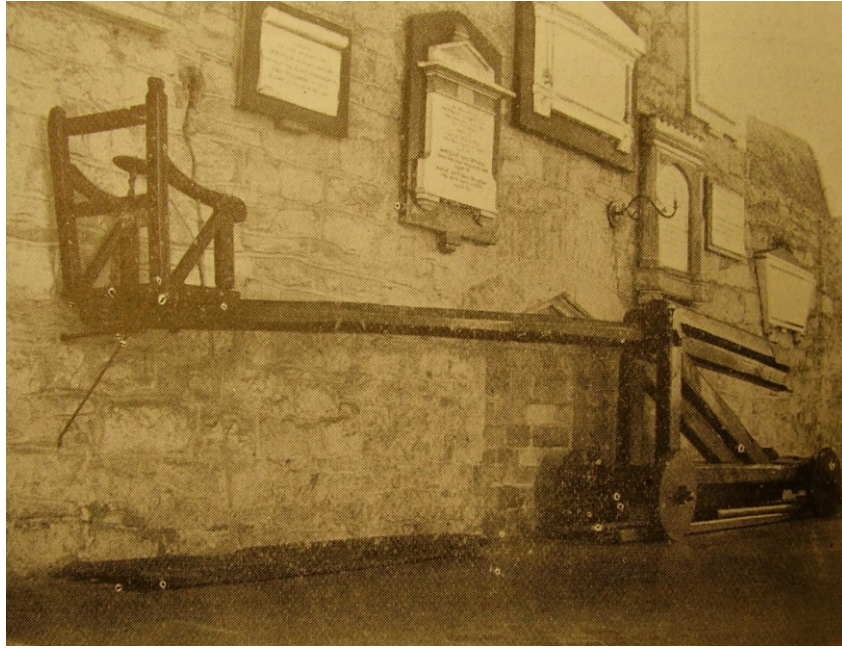


Figure 2.9: ‘Droitwich – Famous Old Ducking Stool’, 1910

The 1910 image of Shilston Cromlech (Figure 2.10) corroborates the idea that the GWR wanted consumers to, literally, see a rough heap of stones as conveying historical interest ‘around which a deal of legend flourishes’.⁹¹ The image had no inherent significance; there was little about it that one could say was charming or typical of this or that region. Taken out of context it may have seemed just a pile of stones awkwardly placed together. Yet the GWR’s marketing invested such photographs with additional meaning; they were presented as being as alluring as a river scene or picturesque valley. The stones were known locally as Spinsters’ Rock, a Neolithic burial site which in 1910, despite repeated collapse and human interference, was still portrayed as a site of mystical practices. This presentation was reliant, of course, on its operation within visual and textual narratives, but once the viewer was familiar with this they could be encouraged to ‘fill in the blanks’ for other images. In this way photography was essential in creating a romantic story and communicating to potential consumers that previously uninteresting buildings or vistas held

⁹¹ GWRM, December 1924, p. 468.

much grander appeal. Whilst several images together could create a fantastical imaginary landscape, photographic realism ascribed them tangibility, superior to the artist's sketch, and the idea that such experiences existed not just in the minds of publicists.



Figure 2.10: 'Shilston Cromlech', 1910

As a further segmentation strategy the GWR encouraged holidaymakers to see destinations as defined by their difference. We have seen already that places just outside London, the Cotswolds and Worcestershire, followed specific visions of southern England.⁹² But the Celtic fringes, Wales and Cornwall, were presented as entirely different. Romance was a key way of communicating the diversity of place which the GWR saw as crucial to winning custom. Wales and Cornwall were therefore portrayed as essentially foreign, a strategy employed in part to persuade domestic tourists that they could find all the wonders of foreign travel on their own doorstep.⁹³ The difference between contemporary urban modernity and the mysterious folk of the Celtic fringes was evident in the presentation of St

⁹² Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, p. 17.

⁹³ Bennett, 'The Great Western Railway and The Celebration of Englishness', pp. 80-83.

Veryan (Figure 2.11). That the ‘typical’ Cornish roundhouses were so different for the urban dweller needed little explaining, but the inclusion of an unusually long textual description is revealing. The idea, that the houses discouraged evil spirits, testifies the sort of message that the GWR hoped the lover of the picturesque would absorb; that they truly were visiting a land not only different visually, but also in its outlook and practices. In this context, important and instantly recognisable symbols such as the cross, the gnarled tree and the rough masonry played new roles in a visual narrative regarding ‘evil spirits’. As well as its foreignness, the ambiance recommended that customers seek out this cultural difference and relate it to their own experiences.



Figure 2.11: ‘St Veryan – Typical Cornish Round Houses’, 1910

Likewise at Bettws Y Coed in North Wales, an old woman, whose attire was distinctly at odds to the luxurious lace-trimmed fabrics of fashionable Edwardian clothing,⁹⁴ was used to promote this small town. The ‘otherness’ and ‘foreignness’ defined by Bennett in the GWR’s Welsh literature was emulated in the visual otherness of the ‘well-known’ character (Figure 2.12).⁹⁵ As seen, locals were manifestations of the GWR’s construction of romantically-perceived areas, in this case the Welsh as mountain people committed to a tribal culture.⁹⁶ Elsewhere, Cornwall’s inhabitants were presented as a romanticised shore community of fishermen. In sheer numbers, fisherfolk were, next to peasants, the single most popular genre subject in the Royal Academy’s annual exhibitions between 1880 and 1900,⁹⁷ and coastal Cornwall was the most painted region of Britain outside London.⁹⁸ Fishermen connoted a dignified, timeless form of labour.⁹⁹ Images such as Polperro, (Figure 2.13), appeared repeatedly in Edwardian volumes of *Holiday Haunts*, each one contributing to the picturesque pantheon by omitting the progress in the fishing industry, such steam trawlers, in favour of the quaint sailing vessels. Just as the landscapes were glamorised, so the industries and people who populated them were heroised as stalwarts of a bygone era, featuring regularly in popular and commercial photography.¹⁰⁰ But whilst the consumers of the early-twentieth century may have rebuffed modernity on the one hand, in other ways they recognised its benefits to everyday life.¹⁰¹ The representation of locals as essentially different and backwards supported the GWR’s aim to target urban middle-class holidaymakers who, in some cases, sought to assert their cultural superiority. Locals, in some cases totally

⁹⁴ Cheryl Buckley and Hilary Fawcett, *Fashioning the Feminine: Representation and Women's Fashion from the Fin de Siècle to the Present*, (London, 2002), p. 16.

⁹⁵ Bennett, ‘The Great Western Railway and The Celebration of Englishness’, p. 76.

⁹⁶ Bennett, ‘The Great Western Railway and The Celebration of Englishness’, pp. 78-79.

⁹⁷ Lübbren, ‘Toilers of the Sea: Fisherfolk and the Geographies of Tourism in England 1880-1900’, pp. 31-46.

⁹⁸ Lübbren, ‘Toilers of the Sea: Fisherfolk and the Geographies of Tourism in England 1880-1900’, pp. 31-46.

⁹⁹ Howard, ‘Artists as Drivers of the Tour Bus’, p. 115.

¹⁰⁰ Mark Haworth-Booth, *The Golden Age of Photography, 1839-1900: Photographs from the Victoria and Albert Museum*, (New York, 1984), p. 157.

¹⁰¹ Marsh, *Back to the Land*, pp. 220-44.

unrepresentative of the actual local population, offered potential consumers further incentives to travel.



Figure 2.12: 'Bettws y Coed - a well-known figure', 1908



Figure 2.13: 'Polperro', 1911

Clearly, the GWR engaged techniques similar to what modern sociologists of tourism define as 'authenticity'. Authenticity describes marketing actions which present 'pseudo events' intended to satisfy tourists' needs for simulated experiences. MacCannell argues that tourists want to share in the real life of places visited, to see that life as it is lived.¹⁰² It is apparent that, some fifty years prior to MacCannell's work, the GWR believed in the efficacy of 'pseudo events'. Comparable practices conditioned the examples seen so far and MacCannell's concept captures the GWR's strategy in the Edwardian years. It hints at the active signifying process in which photographers and GWR marketers structured and shaped what the viewer was meant to think and feel during the holiday selection procedure.

The idea that these were eminently attractive to foreign visitors formed a further cornerstone in marketing appeals. Broadway, for example, was celebrated for its romantic past; it possessed many quaint examples of fourteenth century architecture, and at nearby Wychemford there was a stone table, dated 1697, dedicated to the memory of Penelope Washington, which bore the Washington coat of arms, the stars and stripes of the United States of America.¹⁰³ The company showed access to 'all the noteworthy travel-shrines of the West, every one of which is closely connected with some remarkable occurrence in the history of the United States'.¹⁰⁴ Further, 'It is to the West that American pilgrims come year after year in search of the information concerning the kinsfolk....who, three hundred years ago, were the companions and associates of Raleigh, Cabot, Somers, White, Endicott or the Penns'.¹⁰⁵ The 'pilgrims' would no doubt have been attracted by imagery which made these connections seem tangible; they saw locals who looked as if their life had been untouched since the time of Raleigh and Cabot. A deliberate ploy appealing to the foreign market, here

¹⁰² Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of The Leisure Class*, (London, 1976), p. 96.

¹⁰³ GWR, *Holiday Haunts*, (1914).

¹⁰⁴ GWR, *Places of Pilgrimage*, (1905), p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ GWR, *Places of Pilgrimage*, (1905), p. 6.

we have in microcosm the features which would define the overall appeals to the lover of the picturesque; aesthetic beauty coupled to romantic historical significance.

Overall, the GWR's romantic gaze formed part of a complex narrative about place. The Edwardian photographs illustrate the GWR Advertising Department's early capability in using symbols to sell, a technique not widely ascribed to photographic marketing until the 1920s.¹⁰⁶ Although the photography was basic, this does not obscure the ingenuity behind the compositions. Whilst most railway advertising of the early 1900s was informative, detailing price and availability, the GWR's photographic marketing engaged in myth-making and symbolism to give its place marketing a deeper appeal. The first two sections have therefore demonstrated that the GWR knew who its consumers were, and that it used these understandings to communicate with them in complex ways. These Edwardian principles laid the foundations for techniques and campaigns used after the war. The notion of an English way of life on the verge of change was heightened in this time when the GWR, sensing a common mood of anxiety, focussed ever more on specific pre-modern rural idylls and practices. Picturesque scenes were continued up until the end of the 1930s, but social changes brought certain elements into greater prominence which naturally put more weight on romanticism.

Section 3: The Anti-industrialism Aesthetic: 1920s and 1930s

As this chapter's first section argued, in the 1920s the GWR moved to a more popular understanding of the picturesque, albeit along refined lines. It capitalised on contemporary fears regarding rural despoliation which became more a part of cultured society. Alison Light

¹⁰⁶ John Hewitt and Helen Wilkinson, *Selling The Image: The Work of Photographic Advertising Limited*, (Bradford, 1996), pp. 6-24; T.J. Jackson-Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America*, (New York, 1994), pp. 324-29; Patricia Johnson, *Real Fantasies: Edward Steichen's Advertising Photography*, (London, 1998), p. 1; Pamela Walker-Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing*, (Baltimore, 1998), pp. 268-69.

argues that after the Great War a set of social, political and economic conditions led England to look inwards on itself, generating a popular culture which aspired to preservation of rural-traditional Britain.¹⁰⁷ While differing over the details, many scholars agree with Light's basic finding. Winter reveals the Great War's lasting legacy on British introspection,¹⁰⁸ and Rieger describes the rural-traditional mindset as a reaction to modernity's onward rush.¹⁰⁹

Documentary photography had displayed the stark realities of war.¹¹⁰ Although for many the 1920s did not constitute an outright rejection of modernity – Matless, for instance, argues that many favoured instead harmonising progress with the past¹¹¹ - an overarching anxiety concerning rural depopulation, agricultural depression, and urbanisation was a highly influential element of middle-class culture.¹¹² This mindset was evident in the popular literary landscape; the travelogue 'searches' by H.V. Morton (*In Search of England*) and J.B. Priestley (*English Journey*)¹¹³ as well as George Orwell's *Coming Up For Air*. Whilst the dream was to recapture a sense of belonging to the countryside, the nightmare was to find it irrevocably changed.¹¹⁴

War had also sharpened perceptions of a need to preserve. The Council for the Protection of Rural England, set up in 1926, joined other established organisations; the National Trust (1895), the Commons Preservation Society (1865), Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (1877) and the Society for Checking the Abuses of Public Advertising (1893).¹¹⁵ Already changing, war had quickened the transformation of landscape from a

¹⁰⁷ Light, *Forever England*, p. 8

¹⁰⁸ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War In European Cultural History*, (Cambridge, 1995).

¹⁰⁹ Rieger, *Technology and The Culture Of Modernity In Britain and Germany*, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ M.L. Sanders and Philip Taylor, *British Propaganda During the First World War, 1914-18*, (London, 1982), p. 155.

¹¹¹ Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, p. 26.

¹¹² Jeremy Burchardt, 'Rurality, Modernity and National Identity between the Wars', *Rural History*, 21:2 (2010), p. 147, Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England*, p. 2.

¹¹³ Henry Vollam Morton, *In Search Of England*, (18th edn., London, 1933); John Priestley, *English Journey*, (London, 1934).

¹¹⁴ Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, p. 174.

¹¹⁵ Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, p. 25.

village world of churches and fields, to towns, wires and roads.¹¹⁶ Stanley Baldwin, Prime Minister from 1923 to 1929 and again between 1935 and 1937, employed these concerns for party political purposes, thereby popularising them further. Despite his background as an industrialist, Baldwin recognised the potential of conjuring a return to rural values; he longed to hear the tinkle of hammer on anvil in the country smithy.¹¹⁷ The views of such men and organisations found ready acceptance amongst the populace. The conjured village of the mind's eye was a substitute for real experiences of a largely urban and suburban audience who readily bought into the dream of a cottage with roses around the door.¹¹⁸ Ever more moved to the suburbs,¹¹⁹ and the country life ideal was propounded in a range of books, magazine and later through radio.¹²⁰ As argued in Chapter One, rather than see the GWR as backward-looking in the 1920s, it was harmonious with the desires of the lover of the picturesque and these influential groups. Many themes survived from the Edwardian years, but at a time when the signs of modernity, cars, people, and the built environment were more prevalent, the GWR increasingly looked back in time.

As it happened, Baldwin was closely associated with the GWR in terms of its management and values. His father, Alfred, had been a director of the company from 1901-05 and chairman from 1905-08, and Stanley held a directorship from 1908-17.¹²¹ Although, as Channon concludes, it would be difficult to evaluate the direct influence of directors on aspects such as marketing,¹²² it is reasonable to assume that their thoughts would have been conveyed to senior managers and hence reflected further down the company chain of command. Similar to Baldwin's usage, the GWR's new visions of rural harmony were

¹¹⁶ Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, p. 25.

¹¹⁷ Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, p. 173.

¹¹⁸ Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, p. 174.

¹¹⁹ Jackson, *Semi-detached London*, p. 170

¹²⁰ Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England*, p. 2.

¹²¹ Bennett, 'The Great Western Railway and The Celebration of Englishness', p. viii.

¹²² Geoffrey Channon, *Railways In Britain and The United States, 1830-1940: Studies In Economic and Business History*, (Aldershot, 2001), p. 212.

commercially motivated reactions to the protests and worries regarding the disappearance of rural Britain. Therefore, throughout the 1920s and 1930s the GWR's publicity department increasingly played to the preferences amongst the middle-class market for a romantic rural, traditional presentation of Britain, an idealisation of the past, non-materialism.¹²³ A shift towards these considerations, and away from scenes of natural, physical-geographic beauty, provides evidence of a re-appraisal of what the seeker of the picturesque wanted in line with popular concerns.

The GWR's encoded imagery came in several tropes. Prominent amongst these was that of the traditional village. Since the early-nineteenth century the country cottage had developed into one of Britain's most enduring and appealing architectural expressions of the ideal of country retirement.¹²⁴ For the urban middle-classes in their modern, suburban semi-detached houses, small thatched cottages presented a more peaceful and traditional existence. The rather more tumbledown appearance of Ogwell Village's Inn and stables (Figure 2.14) connoted a land alien to the modern art, film and music of the mid-'twenties. The only 'advertising', for example, was the inn's sign. Similar-sized villages such as Princes Riseborough and St Anthony in Roseland were minor destinations but their romantic names thrust them into the spotlight. For 1923's *Holiday Haunts*, Whiteleaf village, near Riseborough (Figure 2.15), was captured in the 'chocolate-box' aesthetic desired by men like Baldwin. Once again, the supporting cast of locals helped complete many scenes. By 1927 a casualty of the internal combustion engine,¹²⁵ the donkey in Figure 2.16 reinforced the message of timelessness and tranquillity as well as providing visual proof that there were areas where traditional practices still thrived. The sorts of narratives desired extended to other publications, and in *The Cornish Riviera*, scenes such as 'Old house and Saxon bridge Polperry' and 'Lanivet near Bodmin' (Figure 2.17) show that *Holiday Haunts'* visual

¹²³ Gold and Revill, *Representing the Environment*, pp. 138-40.

¹²⁴ Andrews, *The Search For the Picturesque*, p. 7.

¹²⁵ Christopher Savage, *An Economic History of Transport*, (London, 1966), p. 96.

messages were replicated elsewhere. At a time when cars were more common, the sight of children playing in the streets would have been increasingly threatened in the suburbs which the middle classes increasingly populated. All assisted the vision of small organic communities in which nature, regularly captured as sprawling and enclosing greenery or dominating trees, cradled the smaller by comparison olde world cottages.



Figure 2.14: 'Newton Abbott – Oghwell Village', 1925



Figure 2.15: 'Whiteleaf Village Near Princes Riseborough', 1923



Figure 2.16: 'Swiss Cottage, Ilfracombe Lee', 1927



Figure 2.17: 'Lanivet near Bodmin', The Cornish Riviera 1927

Another element to the GWR's pre-modern parable was the emphasis directed to churches, their interiors and exteriors, as well as their place in village life. Interwar Britain was increasingly secular, but this meant not an outright rejection of the values connected to such places. The leisure revolution saw church attendances begin to fall in the 1920s,¹²⁶ but scholars have questioned how far declining attendance reflected a decrease in religiosity or simply a privatisation of religious belief.¹²⁷ Although many people were not churchgoers they visited churches as part of their leisure; people were drawn to the sacred spaces.¹²⁸ Perhaps the result of an awareness of this culture, churches and places of worship littered the pages of *Holiday Haunts* throughout the 1920s and early-1930s. Indeed, the GWR released more specialist volumes intended for antiquarians, the *Cathedrals* and *Abbeys* guidebooks were approved by the dean of each included monument.¹²⁹ *Holiday Haunts* took the message to a wider audience. Either as the focal point of photographs in neatly composed villages scenes such as Figure 2.18 of Portesham Village, or alluded to in a more enigmatic character,

¹²⁶ Stuart Mews, 'Religion 1900-1939', in Chris Wrigley (ed.), *A Companion to Early Twentieth-Century Britain*, (Oxford, 2002), pp. 470-74.

¹²⁷ Jeremy Morris, 'The Strange Death of Christian Britain: Another Look at the Secularization Debate', *The Historical Journal*, 46:4 (2003), pp. 963-76.

¹²⁸ Mews, 'Religion 1900-1939', p. 482.

¹²⁹ Pole, *His Book*, p. 84.

the mention of the word in Figure 2.19, the signs of religion dominated the ideal village life constructed within the pages of GWR guides. To the tourist, the village church, just like the village green or pub, served not only as interesting pieces of architecture, but also representative of local community and a visual symbol of togetherness which was apparently being lost in the large urban areas. To seek it was, again, to search for something more wholesome, something also perceived to be on the verge of extinction in a rapidly changing age, and therefore equally worthy as the mill-stream or peasant toil.



Figure 2.18: 'Portesham Village and Church', 1923



Figure 2.19: 'Church Steps, Minehead', 1927

Elsewhere, images detailed scenes of rural labour. They corroborated the shift from natural scenes of beauty to constructed visions of life in danger of transformation, and thus extended the appeal of things like villagers and horse-carts. The GWR was keen to point out their 'timelessness' or 'rural character'. Thatchers finishing a roof outside of Evesham (Figure 2.20) provides evidence that the romantic gaze was firmly located in a set of supposedly age-old rural values. The cross, striking through the centre of the image indicates artistry on the photographer's part. Its weathered stone did not obscure its straightness and sturdiness and perhaps the photographer meant this as a visual metaphor for the thatchers: although under attack they remained as strong as ever. An unusual image for a holiday brochure, its inclusion developed the GWR's set of ideals surrounding rural consumption. The appeal of timeless labour was celebrated, as the previous section detailed, to the quaint fishing village. Figure 2.21 depicts a fishing community, again from *The Cornish Riviera*, which made similar reference to practices and people untouched by modernity. The rough stone walls reflected the rough clothes and faces of these fishermen. The inclusion of the female child is interesting here, was she meant to be read as a tourist's child having her

picture taken with the locals? Her holiday-style clothing supports this reading. A contemporary Kodak advert (Figure 2.22) suggests what other businesses thought about the value of ‘strange’ people and scenes to customers: the GWR employed a similar narrative about the availability of such experiences. The lover of the picturesque, now understood more as a lover of anything historic or ‘quaint’, desired what could not be found in London, and this extended to ‘strange people’ and customs which were not a part of mass seaside holiday.



Figure 2.20: ‘Thatchers at Work Near Evesham’, 1938



Figure 2.21: ‘A typical corner of Mevagissey’, *The Cornish Riviera*, 1928



Figure 2.22: 'Take a "Kodak" with you', 1923¹³⁰

As well as the revival of 'authenticity', discussed in the previous section,¹³¹ the GWR's publicity photography created habits of 'vision' and corresponding habits of 'blindness'.¹³² The habit of vision created by the GWR was of an apparently realistic and tangible picturesque Britain, but 'blindness' further conditioned the message. If these photographs were accurate representations of place then one would expect more wires, cars, road markings and far more people. Almost no evidence of twentieth century human intrusion testifies to the constructed nature of the marketing messages. A counter-argument might suggest that these places were inherently un-modern. Rural England was heavily affected by economic depression, with many villages suffering lack of investment and an exodus of young labour.¹³³ But the GWR's alternative visual narrative was one of contented

¹³⁰ *The Daily Mirror*, 23rd June 1923.

¹³¹ MacCannell, *The Tourist*, p. 96.

¹³² Ian Ousby, *The Englishman's England: Taste, Travel, and the Rise of Tourism*, (Cambridge, 1990), p. 5.

¹³³ Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England*, p. 8-26; Charles Mowat, *Britain Between The Wars, 1918-1940*, (Chicago, 1955), p. 255.

rurality where agriculture still thrived. The absence of the real condition of rural Britain confirms that the GWR's appeals were indeed authored. As Jenkins concludes for the company's images of Wales, the vision was profoundly idealised; Wales was portrayed as a country where the sun was always shining and it hardly ever rained, where women apparently still wore the tall black hats of traditional Welsh dress.¹³⁴ Industry and industrial decline was nowhere to be seen, hardships and boredom were not dwelled upon. Though damaged in many ways by industrialisation, in the minds of many the countryside still represented a highly useable set of core values.¹³⁵ In this sense the GWR engaged in a selective nostalgia¹³⁶ which was used to sell even its more desperate destinations.

What is less clear is whether the GWR thought harder about how to differentiate between the foreign and domestic holidaymaker. The problem was never taken up explicitly in company records, but did these typically British concerns have wider value? The trend of idealising and romanticising a bygone age to portray it as more wholesome was similarly popular in the United States where imagery concerning past, 'better' times were more common in advertising than in real life.¹³⁷ American railroads released their own 'romantic gaze' to domestic markets which focussed on native Indians.¹³⁸ The same rhetoric of 'quaint' and 'romance' was used time and again. The American market was thus very capable of decoding similar sorts of symbolism. Quite possibly, the GWR acknowledged these appeals, saw them as effective, and decided to sell this vision to Americans who even if, at first, they might not have grasped the specific meaning, probably weaved their own narratives about quaint lands. In the 1920s GWR representation in the United States grew larger and more

¹³⁴ Olivia Jenkins, 'Photography and Travel Brochures: The Circle of Representation', *Tourism Geographies*, 5:3 (2003), p. 5.

¹³⁵ Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, pp. 174-80.

¹³⁶ Raymond Williams, 'Between Country and City', in Simon Pugh (ed.), *Reading Landscape: Country-City-Capital*, (Manchester, 1990), p. 7.

¹³⁷ Roland Marchand, *Advertising The American Dream: Making Way For Modernity, 1920-1940*, (Berkeley, 1986), p. 260.

¹³⁸ Victoria Dye, *All Aboard for the Santa Fe: Railway Promotion of the Southwest, 1890s to 1930s*, (Albuquerque, 2006), pp. 27-30.

professionalised, ultimately being assisted by the widespread recognition of the need to market Britain abroad. By the end of the decade the New York office distributed advertising material to a list of over 1000 agents.¹³⁹ The GWR thought itself rather forward thinking in this respect, and referred to the situation elsewhere in Britain where foreign tourists, whilst always welcome, were ‘never definitely encouraged’.¹⁴⁰

This section has already included some indication of the Kodak company’s take on the value of rural Britain, and interwar building societies used a similar visual rhetoric to sell home ownership.¹⁴¹ But further sense of the novelty of the GWR’s visual messages can be found in a concise comparison to how other transport companies linked corporate image to ideas about the countryside. By removing its publicity from roadsides and onto its petrol tankers, Shell, for example, fostered an image as a responsible organisation with strong associations with nature and rural Britain.¹⁴² This theme has been considered by various other historians. They suggest that automobile manufacturers, and support industries such as Shell’s oil, were aware of their middle-class clientele’s tastes. As such they presented their products as ways to experience place in more exclusive and educated ways.¹⁴³ Matless, examining the role of interwar motoring, points to a middle-class discovery of rural England, a more intellectual appreciation of the land, a ‘motoring pastoral’.¹⁴⁴ Shell’s *County Guides* series similarly focussed on the joys to be had by discovering the beauty and character of Britain by car.¹⁴⁵ Yet Shell’s first guide was released in 1934; the GWR’s publications predated this by several decades. Indeed, Morton’s ‘discovery’ of Britain in the late 1920s and 1930s offered visions which were very similar to the GWR’s creation. Take for example

¹³⁹ GWRM, October 1929, p. 414.

¹⁴⁰ GWRM, December 1929, p. 480.

¹⁴¹ John Gold and Margaret Gold, ‘“Home at Last!”: Building Societies, Home Ownership and the Imagery of English Suburban Promotion in the Interwar Years’, in John Gold and Stephen Ward (eds.), *Place Promotion: The Use of Publicity and Marketing to Sell Towns and Regions* (Chichester, 1994), pp. 79-85.

¹⁴² Michael Heller, ‘Corporate Brand Building: Shell-Mex Ltd. In The Interwar Period’, in Teresa Da Silva Lopes and Paul Duguid (eds.), *Trademark, Branding and Competitiveness*, (New York, 2010), pp. 202-09.

¹⁴³ Sean O’Connell, *The Car In British Society*, (Manchester, 1998), pp. 150-58.

¹⁴⁴ Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, pp. 64-66.

¹⁴⁵ David Heathcote, *A Shell Eye on England: The Shell County Guides, 1934-1984*, (Faringdon, 2011).

the photograph of Dolgelly (Figure 2.23) in 1932 and compare it to the GWR's of 1914. This has consequences for our understanding of the general convergence between transport marketing and the rural. Several scholars criticise the absence of the railways in Matless' examination,¹⁴⁶ and the photographic evidence presented here furthers the idea that the GWR recognised earlier, and with more diversity, that the countryside could be used to sell travel in more ways than just as an ultimate destination.



Figure 2.23: 'The Torrent Falls – Dolgelly', 1932¹⁴⁷

But not all railways approached this idea in the same way; the GWR's take was somewhat unique. Amongst the other post-amalgamation railways, Bennett's assessment of the SR finds that whilst this company included elements of rural tradition in its marketing, it gave precedence to the expression of modernity, a contemporary identity that celebrated progress and the present for its own sake.¹⁴⁸ The romantic past was used even less by the London and North Eastern and London Midland and Scottish railways, possibly because American tourists tended to dock at ports along the South-West coast meaning that their first

¹⁴⁶ Watts, 'Evaluating British Railway Poster Advertising', p. 33; Bennett, 'The Great Western Railway and The Celebration of Englishness', pp. x-xi.

¹⁴⁷ Henry Vollam Morton, *In Search of Wales*, (London, 1932), p. 145.

¹⁴⁸ Bennett, 'The Great Western Railway and The Celebration of Englishness', p. 174.

contact was with the GWR and SR. More research is of course needed, and it would be interesting to know whether the sort of developed consideration of this market segment existed on other railways, and how valuable it was against, for example, more ‘modern’ representations of consumers. But once again then, the adoption or rejection of a focus on landscape appears predicated on commercial considerations of the market.

The GWR continued to use its version of the romantic-picturesque well into the 1930s. The changes, outlined above, were however driven by a broadening of this market segment to include members of the ‘new’ middle classes and those who desired a more ‘popular’ culture. The GWR saw that these could be influenced, and located in its imagery an emphasis on village life, the timelessness of rural practices and an aversion to modernity. As explored in this chapter’s first section, the ‘jaded city worker’ came under greater consideration. But a further popularisation of the market, in time with changing holiday cultures more generally, influenced how and why the romantic gaze declined.

Section 4: The Decline of the Romantic Gaze

Picturesque vistas, olde-worlde architecture and traditions had constituted a strong force in GWR marketing for some thirty years, reflecting both the tastes of the market and its importance in terms of overall discretionary travel. Continued into the 1930s, we see the persistence of ideas approximating to ‘authenticity’ and blindness, albeit this time in the company’s magazine. Take for example the published and unpublished views of the Cotswolds village of Painswick. The unpublished negative depicted the street as captured realistically in the 1930s, full of people, scorched by road-markings and blotted by advertising hoardings and road-signs. Such a view was at odds with the GWR’s marketing processes discussed so far, but it could remedy the situation. In the published image simple

techniques were used to manipulate the viewer's perceptions. The photograph was cropped to obscure the road-markings and the 'RAC' sign: the billboard further down the road was darkened to obscure its message. Finally the text re-enforced these pictorial messages by describing the town's beauty. This gives an, albeit later, insight into how the process might have operated since the Edwardian years, with 'blindness' informing what was captured and, ultimately, shown to potential customers.



Figure 2.24: GWR B Series Negative 12189

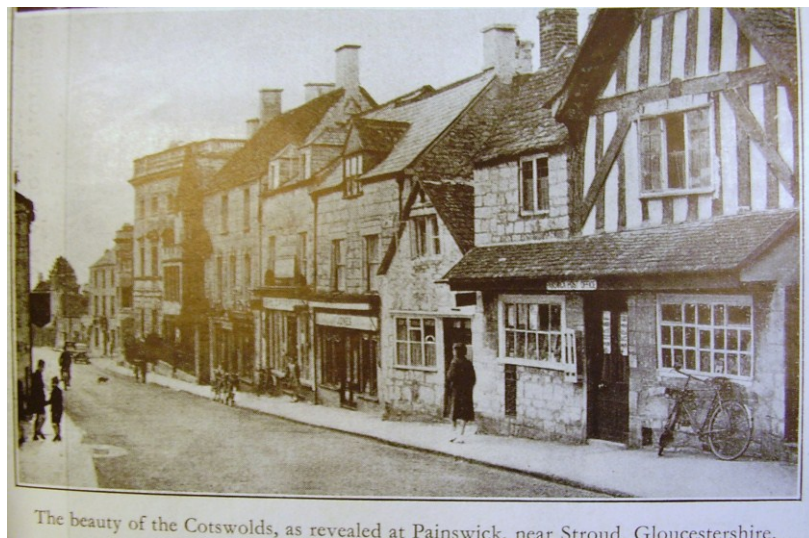


Figure 2.25: 'Painswick', 1937¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ GWRM, April 1927, p. 157.

However, as the 1930s progressed, emphasis on the picturesque romantic worldview lessened in favour of a more modern, mass interaction with place. As seen in the previous chapter, in the 1930s a lifestyle emerged around the holiday which had more to do with glamour and fashion than quaint fishing villages. Holidaymaking practices shifted to artificial entertainments, the ‘bathing boom’ and activities associated with the crowd, undoubtedly a result of the increasing availability of longer holidays to the upper echelons of the working classes.¹⁵⁰ As a result the GWR’s places did not change; the way they were presented did. As John Dewar advised Maxwell Fraser, superlative and over-flowery language was no longer appropriate for *Holiday Haunts*.¹⁵¹ Dewar understood that the bulk of modern consumers were no longer interested in lyrical descriptions of history and beauty, and this new understanding was applied to visual place marketing. Whereas previously the exclusion of people had been rigidly enforced, photographs began to show consumers in the scenes. The lover of the picturesque had now become a much more ‘niche’ segment. A comparison of the shifting representation of one coastal village, Clovelly, throughout the interwar period reveals how mass appeal was carefully woven into destinations which formerly conformed to the picturesque gaze.

Figure 2.26, appearing in the first post-war *Holiday Haunts*, illustrated Clovelly as a quaint English seaside village. It conformed to the conventions outlined above, an appeal not just of a timeless practice, but a heroic struggle in the face of constant jeopardy.¹⁵² Textually, Clovelly was described as ‘an unique little resort’; the main street composed of step steps which were best navigated by donkeys rather than modern transport.¹⁵³ The accompanying photograph displayed these features, the viewer’s eye being directed to the middle of the photograph and the young man leading two donkeys towards the camera. In ways similar to

¹⁵⁰ Walton, *The British Seaside*, pp. 58-59.

¹⁵¹ The National Library of Wales, GB 0210 MAXSER: F 151-300, Letter from Dewar to Fraser, 14th June 1939.

¹⁵² Lübbren, ‘Toilers of the Sea: Fisherfolk and the Geographies of Tourism in England 1880-1900’, pp. 29-30.

¹⁵³ GWR, *Holiday Haunts*, (1921).

the imagery of other small villages, Clovelly's early appearances were meant to connote a relaxed existence untouched by modernity. The donkeys, heads bowed suggested a sleepy way of life. The ivy-covered houses hinted at naturalistic qualities, the idea that nature was taking over this ancient place, and the masts in the foreground signified her fishing heritage. There are people in the background who could be tourists, but even after close scrutiny this is not definitely evident to detract from the photograph's overall intention; to be consumed as a sign of 'the other', a window onto an historic and tranquil way of life.



Figure 2.26: 'Clovelly High Street', 1921

Much the same message informed later images. Figure 2.27, used both in 1923 and 1928, presented Clovelly's fishing heritage as still very much alive, albeit continuing in time-honoured fashion. Elderly fishing boats, weaved baskets, men in local garb and the famous donkeys all saw detailed representation. Little had changed in the visual message from 1921. The content of the image suggested that it could have been taken decades before the 1920s, devoid of any of the trappings of contemporary life. The overarching message remained the same; here was a place which provided an out-of-the-ordinary tourist experience. By contrast, although the next appearance in 1931 (Figure 2.28), retained many 1920s features, it captured Clovelly on the cusp of change, beginning to be presented as a bustling tourist

attraction. Although outwardly a carbon copy of the 1921 view, the donkeys remained being led by a man in working garb, these contrasted with what were obviously tourists, a suited man dodging between baskets of produce and a couple who lingered. In the distance a family strode hand-in-hand towards the sea. The image represented modernity, but within limits. It is difficult to tell whether this reflected the actual discovery of Clovelly as a popular resort, or whether the GWR sought to do away with the sleepy harbour image. Dewar's comments, and the information in the previous chapter suggest that the latter was probably considered at least to some degree: seeking to grow the market, visual signs that Clovelly had more to offer those in search of hustle and bustle possibly informed the inclusion of what were, obviously, tourists.



Figure 2.27: 'Clovelly', 1923 & 1928



Figure 2.28: 'Clovelly High Street', 1931

Our final image, from 1938, represents the completion of the popular aesthetic. By this date marketing Clovelly had shifted completely from the quaint fishing village to historically themed fairground. Photographs (Figure 2.29) now recommended noise and fun rather than quiet and intellectual appreciation. The donkeys no longer signified timeless local labour, instead they were utilised as tools for the tourist trade. It is quite possible that more money could be made from hiring the donkeys out to young people than in using them to haul fish. The people sported modern and youthful fashions and their relaxed, reclining postures

connoted a more convivial enjoyment of place as the destination was consumed for fun rather than artistic sensibility. This photograph may have been posed especially for the GWR, the photographer positioning himself in the middle of the path whilst probably shouting instructions to ‘act natural’. It nevertheless points to a complete re-negotiation of whom the GWR hoped to attract to Clovelly, and what it saw as best capturing the attention of this market.



Figure 2.29: ‘Clovelly’, 1938

This is not to say that this ‘modern’ character affected all images, but the dominant change was now to depict people consuming heritage sites. It reflected large-scale modernisation of facilities and activities associated with previously picturesque and romantic resorts which catered to those with modern demands and who cared little if the scene was spoilt. Such was the case at the Cheddar gorge cave complex in Somerset. Reporting recent building work, the GWR’s magazine assured readers that ‘a thing of beauty is a joy for ever’, and there was no fear that the magnificent gorge would lose its appeal. Nevertheless, the proprietor, determined that the gorge’s ‘natural endowments’ should be enhanced, constructed a magnificent new restaurant and snack-bar into the rocks overhanging the caves.

Though care was taken to fit the restaurant into its pre-historic surroundings, it also featured extravagant 1930s architecture; the glass roof suspended a foot of water filled with hundreds of gold-fish.¹⁵⁴ The project was intended to attract additional visitors, the history of the place seemingly not enough, and was just one in a range of ventures across the GWR's territory as 'modernisation' took place at rural and coastal resorts.¹⁵⁵

But there is an additional level of complexity. Whilst signs of modernity were introduced for the popular market, romantic symbols were retained for niche's within the lover of the picturesque. For example, historical charm remained an essential component in maintaining and expanding the American market. Publicity managers in the 1930s remembered the need to attract these customers who were directed to places such as Shakespeare's birthplace and the London attractions. As well as in photography, film was used to convey this message. Dewar explained, at a preview of the GWR's new film 'Duchy of Cornwall', that he intended to create in pictures the attractive individuality of Cornwall. Focussing on tin mining, the china clay industry and sea fishing, Dewar considered that the film should be shown on the liners bringing visitors to Britain, and indeed Dewar was speaking to representatives of shipping companies who had been invited especially.¹⁵⁶ Domestic lovers of the picturesque still featured in GWR marketing but they were now far behind other groups seen to take precedence. For example, the company's large publication *The Cornish Riviera* was now seen more as a 'niche' guide catering solely to the lover of the picturesque. It, for example, showed a contrasting image of Clovelly in 1934 which was more reminiscent of the 1920s imagery (Figure 2.30). Similarly romanticised text which alluded to 'the grave faces of the fishermen, to us so dignified and picturesque',¹⁵⁷ showed the retention of the romantic to be the overall intention. Prominent signs of Britain's

¹⁵⁴ GWRM, August 1935, p. 406

¹⁵⁵ See for example, "'All clear" for the 1934 Holiday Season', GWRM, April 1934; Walton, *The British Seaside*, p. 100.

¹⁵⁶ *The Railway Gazette*, 11th March 1938, p. 498.

¹⁵⁷ GWR, *The Cornish Riviera*, (1934), p. 5.

heritage, ruined castles, the landmark sites of London, and Shakespeare land, were all retained in *Holiday Haunts* up until the Second World War. But it could be equally true that as more domestic and foreign tourists holidayed in the 1930s there were few truly secluded places. The myth had to have some basis in reality to work, and thus the GWR was probably aware of the level of photographic authenticity that it could get away with before seeming ridiculous. Nevertheless, the continued changes in photographic content, the selection of appropriate imagery for niches in this market segment, points to photography's central role in communicating the GWR's detailed understanding of the lover of the picturesque.



Figure 2.30: 'Clovelly', *The Cornish Riviera*, 1934

Section 5: Conclusions

Through a detailed analysis of one particular market segment, this chapter has deepened the understanding of the GWR's picturing process. The first section analysed how

the lover of the picturesque was identified, through their jobs; geographical location; interests and politics. Each subsequent section showed how these considerations were represented in photographic marketing. The photographs reveal more about the GWR's understanding of its customers, specifically in symbolic content which was shown to be a carefully authored part of each image. This content referenced contemporary concerns in order to convince customers that they were not simply consuming rail travel. The GWR asked customers to consider threats to traditional Britain, the 'foreignness' of certain areas, and the despoliation caused by modern technologies such as the motor car. The GWR's photographic marketing was therefore complex. Picturesque imagery did not just show destinations in visually pleasing ways; it used symbolic content, shaped by the interests of customers, to enforce a specific interpretation and thereby direct consumption. A customer centred approach is also revealed in the periodic re-assessment of who was doing the consuming. The GWR re-dressed its appeals to engage a more popular market perhaps not so enamoured with a strictly antiquarian or artistic appreciation of the land. Although the GWR was 'backward-looking', this perspective was commercially driven by understandings of its market segments.

This chapter has identified some important considerations against the existing literature concerning how railways used landscape. We know that railways presented landscapes as fantasy worlds but this chapter offers additional nuance over studies of the poster. Firstly, the far more frequent and numerous photographs allow greater analysis of how this fantasy world was changed and shaped over time in response to contemporary fashions (for example, it dismissed the view that the GWR always put out a conservative landscape view). Furthermore, in establishing who the GWR saw as populating this segment, and again how this changed over nearly forty years, it built up a clearer relationship between the company, the marketing messages, and the customer. By treating this 'background'

information alongside the marketing photographs, it revealed the greater extent to which passengers helped in some cases to co-author the fantasy worlds they were presented with.

The photographs reveal much in addition to what has already been written about the GWR's 'conservative modernity'.¹⁵⁸ Whilst the visual perspective confirms Bennett's broad findings, that the historical, pastoral dimension was a definitive feature of the GWR's literary record,¹⁵⁹ it showed what the more instantly accessible photograph could do for communicating the GWR's message. Although in some cases text and image worked together, after initial experience the customer was encouraged to weave their own narratives about place; 'what hitherto appeared to be a rough heap of stones upon a hilltop is transformed into the ruins of a castle of great historical interest around which a deal of legend flourishes'.¹⁶⁰ We must not forget, the GWR intended the photographs to be the first thing that customers came across when browsing *Holiday Haunts* and other company guidebooks. This chapter has also suggested how the GWR's efforts have been miss-represented. The 'motoring pastoral', which linked the car to rurality and strong national values,¹⁶¹ has been taken as good marketing by some, but a comparable 'railway pastoral' arguably existed much earlier. Both show receptiveness to contemporary fashions and desires, the segmentation of the lover of the picturesque by the GWR shows that its marketing at least kept pace, if not surpassed, those more commonly considered innovative.

Above all, the GWR presented what modern-day travel marketers see as a range of sophisticated techniques for making the tourist believe that they see a timeless culture poised on the edge of change,¹⁶² to foster a 'see it before it is too late mentality'.¹⁶³ But this example

¹⁵⁸ Divall and Shin, 'Cultures of Speed and Conservative Modernity', p. 6; Watts, 'Evaluating British Railway Poster Advertising', p. 47.

¹⁵⁹ Bennett, 'The Great Western Railway and The Celebration of Englishness', p. 110.

¹⁶⁰ GWRM, December 1924, p. 468.

¹⁶¹ Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, pp. 64-66; O'Connell, *The Car In British Society*, pp. 150-58.

¹⁶² Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 2nd edn., p. 45.

¹⁶³ Elizabeth Edwards, 'Postcards: Greetings From Another World', in Tom Selwyn (ed.), *The Tourist Image: Myths and Myth Making In Tourism*, (Chichester, 1996), p. 202.

of targeted marketing is better understood when compared to the GWR appeals to other market segments. Therefore, the next chapter discusses the family market. As defined in the introduction to this thesis, the romantic gaze was just one way of appealing to consumers. A comparison between this and the 'collective' gaze reveals more about a nuanced understanding of potential customers, and a developed sign system for communicating different activities and sensibilities.